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An order of distinction (or, how to tell a collection from a hoard)

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Abstract
What is the difference between a collection and a hoard? This article draws upon an array of sources – from the DSM-V and current psychiatric research on hoarding, to recent media stories and artist Song Dong's *Waste Not* (2009), to the author's own participant observation with the Toronto Hoarding Coalition and the 21 ethnographic interviews she conducted with professional home organizers in the Greater Toronto Area between 2014 and 2015 – to examine how popular and psychiatric discourses that distinguish collecting and hoarding reveal a complex set of rules about what constitutes the healthy and moral ordering, organization and arrangement of one's material possessions in contemporary life. In an age of seemingly limitless possibilities for accumulation, the author argues that it is not just the fact of having things that stands as a matter of distinction. One must also demonstrate an active engagement in practices related to the curation and management of one's object world.

Keywords
collecting, hoarding, order/disorder, professional organizers

Like many other Professional Organizers (POs), Gail's years of working in the industry have helped her develop a keen eye for the behaviors and habits that, she says, make it difficult for her clients to get and stay organized. One issue in particular has been an endless source of puzzlement to her. 'Believe it or not,' Gail told me, 'there are many clients who can't … sort things! They just – it's a mental block for them. They're not able to separate [things] and put like with like.' To illustrate, Gail relayed an experience she'd had with one of her 'chronically disorganized' clients, a woman in her 50s who, Gail

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said, manages to maintain a successful career and a thriving social life despite her disordered and over-stuffed living space:

> We were in the kitchen and she wanted to [work] side by side with me and I said, 'Okay, let's empty the cupboards out and put like with like.' [My client] was almost frozen, like she just didn't know how to do that. So I said, 'Okay, let's start with this drawer. I'll have you do this drawer of cooking utensils. Just put like with like.' And she couldn't do it! She just couldn't put the knives with the knives and whisks with the whisks.

Fran, a dynamic PO in the Toronto area who recently started her own home organizing business, noted a similar phenomenon. 'I see it all the time', she said:

> Lots of the clients I see – they just don't know how to sort and categorize. They make too many categories of things. Like, every folder on their desktop has one single file in it. Physical file folders – same thing. It's not, you know, one file folder for all the automotive bills. It's 'Automotive January' and one bill. 'Automotive February' and one bill. And so on. They over-categorize things. And then there are the other clients who are just the opposite: they create these categories that are so big that everything just gets lost inside of them.

Gail and Fran, both Anglo/white middle-class women between the ages of 40–55 who had other careers prior to launching their own Professional Home Organizing businesses, fit the 'typical' demographic profile of the approximately 4500 POs who are currently working in the US and Canada. They also match the 'typical' profile of most of their clients. Like other POs, Gail and Fran have much insight into how people relate to and order their material possessions. They look upon their clients' difficulties with sorting, categorizing and putting 'like with like' with puzzled interest and even fascination. 'It seems so simple, right?' Fran said, shaking her head and smiling. 'Well, it's not at all obvious to the people I work with.' Over-categorizers tend to approach every object as if it has unique properties that make it wholly distinct from all others, while under-categorizers view objects as being bound together by their shared features in such a way that it makes little sense to separate them. One is reminded here, perhaps, of Foucault's (1994[1966]: xv) bemused reaction to Borges' description of a passage from a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' that distinguishes the key attributes of animals according to a seemingly nonsensical array of descriptive categories. To Foucault as to Gail and Fran, being confronted with what appears to be a radically different taxonomic system makes tremble all the 'ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things'. It creates a dizzying effect, giving pause and provoking uneasy laughter. 'In the wonderment of this taxonomy', Foucault writes, 'the thing that … is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own.'

The work of Claude Lévi-Strauss may suggest yet another reason for this wonderment. In the first chapter of *The Savage Mind* (1966), Lévi-Strauss reflects upon the relentless pursuit of humans to name and categorize the world around them, insisting that it is not simply practicality or function, but rather aesthetic pleasure and intellectual satisfaction that drive such order-making endeavors. Human thought itself, writes Lévi-Strauss, is 'founded on this demand for order' (p. 10). From this perspective, order-making

is viewed as an essential human characteristic – it both confirms and confers human*ness*. Extending this same logic, the act of viewing another person as failing to make or keep order (or as lacking a taxonomic system altogether) may throw the very humanity of that person into question. Indeed, we see evidence of such dehumanization in media descriptions of 'hoarders' and their stuff – allusions made, for example, to packrats, goat paths, hovels, and pigsties.

But such puzzlement over 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966: 53) may signal more subtle forms of othering and difference-making as well. In what might rightly be called an Age of Consumption – an era in which acts of acquiring, accumulating, consuming, storing and discarding not only make up so much of what we do each day but are fundamentally constitutive of self and personhood – the ways we organize our material possessions are seen to mark class status and moral reason just as they may designate pathology (Kilroy-Marac, 2016). The three are, in fact, closely linked. Reflecting upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984), we are reminded that it is not just objects but also their arrangement in space and the meaning derived from this order (meaning that 'goes without saying because it comes without saying', Bourdieu, 1977:167) that serve to naturalize ideology, inculcate habitus, and express both class and taste – or what Bourdieu (1984: 468) referred to as 'internalized, 'embodied' social structures' that 'become a natural entity to the individual'. As more people have access to more stuff, it is not just things themselves *but also the ordering and management of those things* that becomes a matter of distinction.

These forms of difference-making are especially visible within current popular and psychiatric discourses circulating throughout North America and the UK that attempt to distinguish collecting and hoarding, and it is precisely this imagined relationship (and distance) between the two behavior sets that stands as the central problematic of this article. In what follows, then, I bring together a diverse array of odds and ends – from clinical psychiatric research on hoarding and the stand-alone diagnosis of Hoarding Disorder in the DSM-V (the 5th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, APA, 2013), to a spate of recent blogs and news media stories related to hoarding and (de)clutter(ing), to Song Dong's remarkable art installation, *Waste Not* (Wu et al., 2009), and recent works by artist Simon Evans and photographer Jim Golden. I draw also on ethnographic data[1] I collected in southern Ontario between 2013–2015, which included a 2-year period of participant observation with the Toronto Hoarding Coalition[2] and a series of 21 semi-structured ethnographic interviews conducted with POs in the region.[3] My main goal of this piece is to show that these varied efforts to distinguish collecting from hoarding do not simply advance a set of ideas about excessive vs 'appropriate' accumulation. They also – and this is the crux of my argument – reveal a complex set of rules about what constitutes the 'proper', healthy, and moral ordering and organization of one's material possessions in our current historical moment.

Beyond excessive accumulation

Before I begin to discuss the various ways that collecting gets distinguished from hoarding in popular and psychiatric discourses, I want to point to one surprising way that the two are said *not* to differ. For this, I turn to the 'Diagnostic Features' section of the

DSM-V Hoarding Disorder diagnosis. 'In some cases [of collecting]', the manual specifies, 'the actual amount of possessions may be similar to the amount accumulated by an individual with hoarding disorder' (APA, 2013: 248). A most remarkable point here is that the distinction between 'normative collecting' and 'pathological hoarding' does not necessarily have to do with the amount of stuff a person has acquired. A Toronto PO named Corine hinted at this idea when she told me that 'hoarders might have the same things a collector does, but because they don't arrange their stuff and care for it in the same kind of way, it's not the same.' Such statements invite the central question that has inspired my line of inquiry in this article – if the difference between collecting and hoarding does not hinge solely upon excessive accumulation, then what exactly *does* it hinge upon?

Allow me to inject a brief excursus here. Between 2005 and 2013, during the very same period that psychiatric researchers and clinicians were debating whether or not Hoarding Disorder should be included into the DSM-V as a stand-alone diagnosis (and thus be disambiguated from the hoarding *behavior* that stands as symptom of a host of other disorders), an art installation called *Waste Not* (2009) by artist Song Dong was exhibited in Beijing, New York, London, Vancouver, and Sydney. The installation, which attracted much attention and acclaim, was made up of tens of thousands of domestic objects that the artist's mother, Zhao Xiangyuan, had acquired, saved, and stored in her small Beijing house over many years, from the period of the Cultural Revolution to the year 2000.

In a 2009 exhibition catalogue entitled 'Waste Not: Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong', art historian Wu Hung recounts that Song Dong had spent many years worrying about his mother; he had been deeply concerned that the over-stuffed house was taking a toll on her physical and emotional health. This concern pushed him to come up with an idea: they would sit together, the artist and his mother. Approaching each of her possessions as a repository for memory, they would sort through the heaps of undifferentiated objects in an effort to lay out, render visible, and catalogue every last bottle cap, toothpaste tube, kitchen utensil, and pair of shoes. Song Dong's goal, writes Wu Hung, was not to assess the relative value of the items or calculate what should be 'purged', but rather to engage in what the artist calls a 'healing through remembering' (Wu Hung et al., 2009) with objects. As a form of therapeutic memory work, he explains, this allowed her to remember (or put back together) her past, to have it all set out before her. In the process, not one thing was discarded. The sum of the contents of Song Dong's mother's life were lined up and grouped together – 'like with like' – and arranged according to an order that was at once taxonomic and syntactic.

Waste Not, the exhibit, was the end product of this memory work. The installation, normally set up for exhibit in a single large room or warehouse, is comprised of perfectly spaced rows and groupings of lighters and paintbrushes, hangers and bowls, often arranged by size and color alongside other objects of similar use or imagined room of origin (bowls near pots and plates and cups; paint brushes near scrapers and tools). The sheer number of objects that make up the installation was breathtaking, as was their careful ordering. Through these careful acts of arrangement, Song Dong's mother's possessions – as well as elements of modern Chinese political and cultural history and ideas about kinship, time, care, and consumption – were rendered intelligible, aestheticized,

and displayed. They are transformed, we might say, from a hoard to a collection (or many collections) in the process.

Historians and social scientists might be itching to add a third term to the mix here: the archive. Could *Waste Not* also be considered an archive of sorts – of a life lived, of love and longing, of modern China? Writing about the challenges of creating (or indeed, even imagining) a postcolonial digital archive in and of rural northwest Australia and reflecting upon the potential of such an archive to house and nurture a 'social otherwise', anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli (2011: 153) gives careful consideration to the logic of the archive and the kind of work archives do. Her thoughts are momentarily arrested by an appraisal of (and preoccupation with) the boundaries of the archive, the collection and the hoard. 'What,' she asks, 'is the difference between an archive and a collection or between an archive and a hoard or between an archivist and a collector and a hoarder? What is altered when the archive is housed in a library, in a classified state vault, [or] in a dour professor's office?' Her thoughts then take a personal turn, toward a kind of self-assessment:

> I have a collection of earrings that I have found on the streets of New York City. It is one of the things I do – I collect discarded earrings, often to the chagrin of my friends, digging them out of the rot that accumulates in the seams of pavements. Why I do this … is one question. But another question, more relevant to the task at hand, is: under what conditions would this collection of lost jewelry become an archive or a part of an archive? Am I an archivist, a collector, a hoarder? Does it matter whether I've indexed my earrings or simply thrown them onto a shelf in my study? (p. 149)

The distinction, it seems, at least according to contemporary popular and psychiatric discourses on the topic, would have everything to do with how Povinelli handles those earrings and what she does with them after their rescue. It would be about the extent to which the earrings were ordered and organized, arranged, spaced, and framed. It would be about whether the earrings were kept separate from other kinds of objects, and it would be about where and how they are stored.

Hoarding's lower limit

In the years leading up to the 2013 release of the DSM-V, as it was looking more and more likely that Hoarding Disorder would be introduced into the new version of the manual as a psychiatric diagnosis in its own right, a dedicated group of researchers set themselves the task of establishing what they understood to be Hoarding Disorder's 'lower limit' – that is, the 'diagnostic line' that separated pathological from 'normal' ways of being with things (Nordsletten et al., 2013: 229). As part of this initiative, the researchers identified collecting as a 'behavior that mirrors many of the core features of hoarding' but is 'generally regarded as both benign and normative' (p. 230). Collecting, they asserted, is an 'egosyntonic leisure activity that [both] provides psychological benefit to its participants' and is quite widespread (with an estimated 30% population prevalence rate) among the general population (Nordsletten and Mataix-Cols, 2012: 166), while hoarding tends to 'result in disorganized clutter, distress, and impairment' and have 'negative impacts' on 'relationships, leisure activities, and occupations' (Nordsletten et al., 2013: 230).

Concerned that the shared features of collecting and hoarding might nevertheless cause diagnostic difficulties, these researchers charged themselves with the task of researching and articulating the clinical distinction between the two behavior sets. 'Adequate consideration of this lower limit represents not merely an important area of inquiry but also a serious responsibility', they stressed, for without a clear demarcation between the two constructs, they feared that the new HD diagnosis could lead to the pathologization of 'normal' behavior as well as the 'misallocation of scarce mental health resources' (p. 229).

The psychiatric nosology that underpins the DSM and structures its diagnostic categories requires a symptom-oriented assessment – here, symptoms are everything. In this context, the shared features (symptoms) of the two behavior sets presented a practical problem: how could clinicians be sure that normal behavior wasn't being pathologized? It's worth noting that psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories tracing back to Freud have also identified commonalities between collecting and hoarding, not related to their shared features but in terms of their cause. Because psychoanalytic and psychodynamic frameworks were (and are) less concerned with establishing symptom-based diagnoses than with understanding the psychical origins of their patients' present-day behaviors and neuroses, outlining the features that *distinguish* collecting from hoarding was simply never a priority. Freud (2010[1920]), for example, saw symptoms as significant in the psychoanalytic context not for the sake of diagnosis, but for the interpretive pathways they may open – symptoms, he wrote, 'have their meaning just like errors and the dream, and like these they are related to the lives of the persons in whom they appear' (p. 2). To Freud (1959[1908]), and later Ernest Jones (1950[1918]) and Nicholas Abraham (1977[1921]), both collecting and hoarding were to be approached as manifestations of the anal character. Following this line of thinking, material possessions may unconsciously symbolize feces, and the act of gathering and holding onto things may point to unresolved issues stemming from the anal stage of development (a topic for another article, to be sure). Within the framework of the more biomedically-oriented psychiatry that dominates current psychiatric thinking in North America, though, assessing the commonalities and distinctions between collecting and hoarding was a critically important step in establishing the diagnostic parameters of the new Hoarding Disorder diagnosis – a diagnosis that was from the outset imagined as a potential pathway by which patients might access treatment, become eligible for support services, and request disability accommodations. What, then, did the psychiatric research have to say about the shared features of – and points of divergence between – collecting and hoarding?

Nordsletten et al. (2013) outline the findings of their London-based research study conducted between October 2010 and December 2011, which compared the behavior sets of '20 self-identified collectors' and 29 persons, recruited from local hoarding support networks, who met 'the criteria for HD' (p. 230). Among their observations, they note that while persons in both groups

> reported the acquisition of, attachment to, and reluctance to discard objects … *collectors were … more focused* in their acquisitions (e.g., confining their accumulations to a narrow range of items), *more selective* (e.g., planning and purchasing only predetermined items), *more likely to organize* their possessions and *less likely to accumulate* in an excessive manner. (p. 229, emphases added)

Significantly, the authors also report key demographic differences between the two groups, though as sample sizes these were admittedly small: the collectors in their group, they note, were more likely to be men and more likely to be partnered; they were more likely to be educated; they were more likely to live in larger dwellings; and they were less likely to have been diagnosed or treated with a psychiatric disorder in the past (p. 235); in short, normative behavior was more often associated with this normative group. Women, unmarried people with less education and of a lower socio-economic status, and people with known mental health issues were more often linked to pathological hoarding. Notably absent from the study was a discussion of the ethnic background of the participants. It is curious, though perhaps not surprising, that symptoms related to this very specific form of 'domestic disorder' – a phrase that itself may conjure gendered ideas of failed feminine domesticity, troubled kinship relations, and problems at home – would be more readily identified among non-normative populations, and such an observation clearly warrants further research and reflection. One cannot help but wonder, for example, if there might be an 'overpathologizing bias' (Good, 1997; Lopez, 1989) at play in the designation of hoarding disorder.

In the final results of their study, Nordsletten et al. (2013) concluded that the behavior sets did actually appear to be sufficiently distinct from one another to make it unlikely that 'normative collecting' would be confused with and pathologized as Hoarding Disorder. This was the consensus leading up to the publication of DSM-V, and in the end, a note was included in the 'Diagnostic Features' section of the manual's Hoarding Disorder diagnosis that underscored the fact that hoarding behavior sharply 'contrasts with normative collecting behavior, which is *organized and systematic*' (APA, 2013: 248, emphasis added).

A 'no brainer': It's all about *taking care*

Beyond the framing of this diagnostic problem in psychiatry, a preoccupation with distinguishing hoarding from collecting has likewise been visible in popular media reports, and home and lifestyle magazines over the past several years, where everything from diagnostic quizzes to 'know the warning signs' checklists begs readers to reflect upon their own relationships with objects (as well as those of their loved ones, friends, and neighbors) in order to assess where they stand. The distinction between collecting and hoarding has also been a recurring theme in conversations I have had with city agency representatives and service providers (including public health nurses, fire services, and social workers) in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as with for-profit intervention specialists (POs, extreme cleaners, interior designers, and storage providers) who have found their niche within the booming clutter management industry, and for whom hoarding is as much an aesthetic, logistical, and environmental problem as it is a mental or public health issue. And yet, when it comes right down to it, many of these folks contend that the commonalities between the hoarders and collectors are theoretical only. In their experiences, they say, the differences between collecting and hoarding are instantly recognizable ('it's a no-brainer', one public health nurse told me), and the only people who seem to ever confuse the terms are hoarders themselves. As Allie, a young PO in Toronto,

insisted, 'a hoarder will tell you they're a collector but they're not taking care of their belongings, their collections. There's a big, big distinction.'

But many people who meet the criteria for Hoarding Disorder do, in fact, keep collections. In the research study cited above, Nordsletten et al. (2013: 236) found that 'about half the HD cases considered themselves "collectors" and could identify at least one collection to which they were adding'. Within the framework of Hoarding Disorder, however, one cannot be a collector and a hoarder all at once. A hoarder's self-identification as a collector is rendered invalid within the Hoarding Disorder diagnosis; their collecting is determined to be far from collecting in the 'true' or 'healthy' sense: 'comparison of this HD collector subset with the healthy collectors … revealed a number of differences in these group's [sic] collecting processes, with HD collectors being unlikely to plan, organize, or share their collections in a manner typical of collectors'. True collectors, we are told, think about, talk about, and handle their wares differently.

For most of the POs with whom I have spoken, the key differences between hoarding and collecting hinge upon two main factors. The first is the extent to which a person orders, arranges, and purposefully displays objects in his or her domestic space (this is an aesthetic distinction), and the second has to do with the corresponding ways that a person is seen to act, feel, and behave toward his or her possessions (this is an affective distinction). The shorthand with which they sum this up has to do with how people 'take care' of things. In what follows, then, I take a closer look at how 'appropriate' forms of taking care get distinguished from 'inappropriate' ways of being with things in some of these discussions that plot collecting against hoarding. I configure these points of distinction around what I have come to think of as *thing attentiveness* and *thing attachment*.

Attentiveness and attachment: Active curation and display

'A collection', a PO named Ellen explained to me over coffee one afternoon, 'is a group of specific things that are treasured, displayed and have a natural ebb and flow, so that the collection is refined on an ongoing basis. Things are taken out, other things are brought in.' For Ellen and many other POs, the figure of the collector exemplifies appropriate forms of caretaking and attentiveness toward objects. A key element of this caretaking coalesces around practices of active curation – collectors are described as having an ongoing awareness, interest, and knowledge of the objects that make up their collections. Collectors know what they've got down to every last item; they know where each item is kept, and how it fits within the collection. A collector, it is said, holds each item of the collection in his or her mind, all at once. The collection must show signs of being actively considered or manipulated; it must be accessible and yet kept separate from other mundane, everyday objects.

POs describe hoarders' domestic worlds as being filled with towering piles of odds and ends without any apparent internal coherence. These piles, they say, show no outward sign of active consideration of intention. A hoard, Ellen stated matter-of-factly, is 'just an amass of stuff'. A key feature of a so-called hoard, then, has to do with the apparently undifferentiated nature of the things found within it. This lack of ability (or will) to differentiate between things – to sort them and organize them in a seemingly coherent way – is precisely what Gail and Fran marveled over at the beginning of this article. A

particular anxiety that has come up often in my interviews with POs has to do with the apparent mixing of differently-valued objects – treasures mixed with trash, and I shall come back to this articulation of value below. 'For the hoarder', explained Allie, 'even when they have valuable stuff in the mix, it's all piled up and thrown into the bedroom or the basement. It's covered with dust and mouse poop, and mixed with other things – paper, garbage, you name it. That's just not a collection.' A similar preoccupation appears in the 'Diagnostic Features' discussion of the DSM-V Hoarding Disorder (APA, 2013: 248):

> The most commonly saved items are newspapers, magazines, old clothing, bags, books, mail, and paperwork, but virtually any item can be saved. The nature of items is not limited to possessions that most other people would define as useless or of limited value. Many individuals collect and save large numbers of valuable things as well, which are often found in piles mixed with other less valuable items.

Among hoarding service providers at the Toronto Hoarding Coalition, casual conversation often revolved around this mixing of treasure and trash as well; in fact, this *mixing* seemed to confirm the HD diagnosis (and inspire incredulity) as much as the excessive accumulation did.

In contrast, the active curation that stands as the hallmark of the collector's orientation toward things seem to be constituted by his or her involvement in ongoing acts of discernment and differentiation when it comes to their possessions. Collectors prize each object in the collection for its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the other items in the collection (there is rarely room in a collection for duplicates, for example). They know a lot about each individual item and often take it upon themselves to keep learning more; they passionately ponder their wares and become intimate with the qualities and distinctions of each of their things. According to Subkowski's (2006: 383) assessment of the key features of collecting, the collector's engagement with his or her things is 'comprehensive and has depth' and commonly 'includes an interest in secondary literature and background information' about the objects in question. We might recall Walter Benjamin's (1999[1983]: 205) ruminations on collecting, written nearly 80 years ago:

> For the true collector … every single thing … becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle.

Collectors easily differentiate between the items in their collections, and have no trouble identifying the key distinguishing characteristics of each object. At the same time, they keep a careful eye on the way each individual item fits with – and relates to – the other objects in the collection. Along with the assessment of difference, then, there is a concurrent assessment of semblance and belonging. Collectors keep in mind how the collection's constituent parts relate not just to each other, but how they work together to form the whole. We might think of this as a kind of syntactic arrangement (syntax, from the Greek σύνταξις, where *syn* [σύν] is 'together' and *táxis* [τάξις] is 'an ordering'). Collectors recognize what is missing from the whole (however 'the whole' may be

defined) and strive for its completion. 'They know what they have', a Toronto PO named Corine explained. 'They know if they're missing a 1974 issue, or something. [Collectors will say:] I'm looking for that one, you know.' What is more, a collection must be clearly demarcated from everything outside of it; around the collection itself, another kind of 'magic circle' is drawn that distinguishes it from mundane, everyday things. This magic circle stands as a boundary that is vigilantly patrolled by the collector, who is always on the lookout for items to bring in or take out.

The active curation that sits at the heart of *thing attentiveness* finds its visible form in the display. Collectors pay close attention to the visual arrangement of their collected items as they bring them into relation with one another. In the display, the taxonomic and syntactic organization of its constituent parts is rendered visible as the conceptual relationships between objects are transposed into the physical realm. Here placement and ordering are key, as is the spacing between items and the background into which the objects are set (see Figure 1). The visual display can be imagined as a kind of 'front stage' performance (Goffman, 1959), though it is worth noting that the success of the visual display often hinges upon a series of 'back-stage' storage practices – it is not just the visual display but also the storage of the 'back-stage' items that must be maintained and curated.

The particular display form I am invoking here has a distinctly Euroamerican history, one that was as bound up with the circulation and consumption of the new mass-produced commodity forms of 'high capitalism' as it was with the articulation of Empire – the two were, in fact, closely intertwined (Buck-Morss, 1991; Clifford, 1988; Karp and Levine, 2012; McClintock, 1995; Mitchell, 1988). Drawing our attention to the consolidation of a novel way of seeing, knowing, and ordering the world that took place in the late 19th and early 20th-century Europe, Bennett (1988: 73) details the emergence of a veritable 'exhibitionary complex' that included art museums as well as

> history and natural science museums, dioramas and panoramas, national and, later, international exhibitions, arcades and department stores – which served as linked sites for the development and circulation of new disciplines (history, biology, art history, anthropology) and their discursive formations (the past, evolution, aesthetics, man) as well as for the development of new technologies of vision.

These emergent display forms and their ordering logics were not only made manifest and affirmed through public institutions, exhibitions, and arcades; they also found their way into (and became an ordering principle of) the bourgeois domestic interior via new forms of consumption and new kinds of consumer goods (Hetherington, 2011). Homes and domestic interiors of all class backgrounds, in fact, were reordered during this period, and their reordering offered a staging ground for the elaboration of hegemonic order and distinctions of all kinds. Anne McClintock (1995: 130), for example, writes of the extent to which the 'Victorian middle-class home became a space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race'. We may likewise recall the many programs of domestic education and housewifery targeting poor and working-class girls and young women that sprang up in the last decades of the 19th century throughout England and beyond (Attar, 1990; Bourke, 1994; Heggie, 2011; Leavitt, 2002; Matthews, 1983;

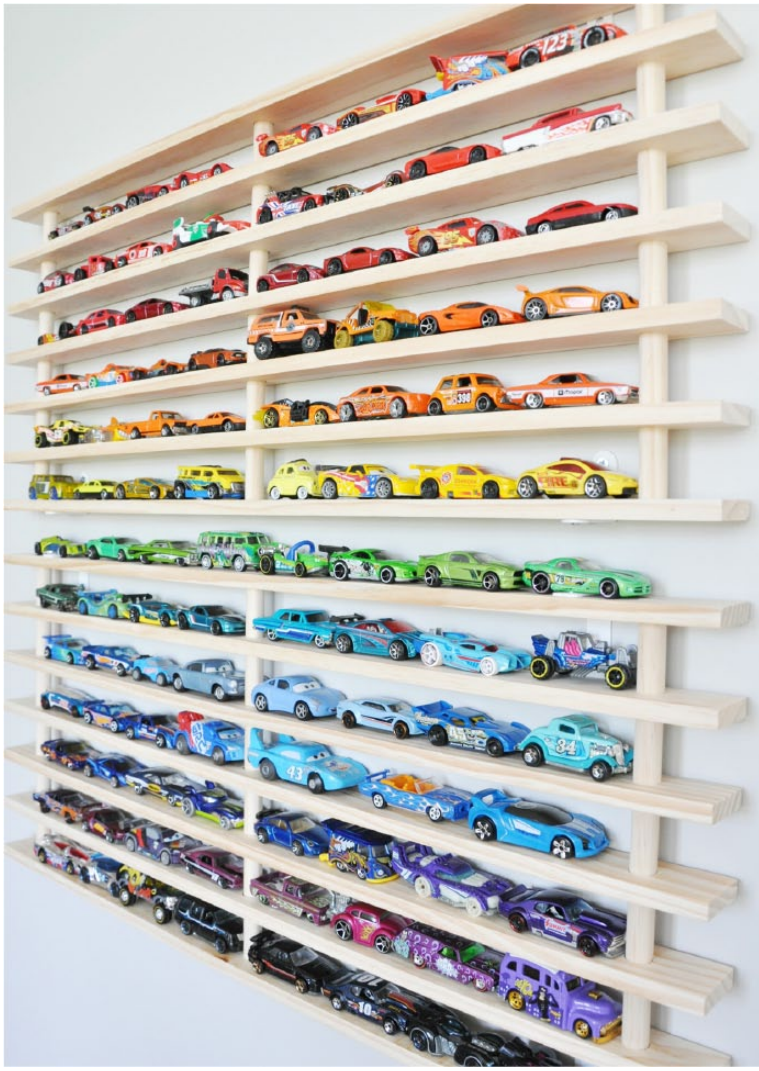

Figure 1. The *'Mom, Where's My Car?' Wall Garage* turns toy car clutter into a collection worthy of a photo finish. This DIY project was designed by Lauren Savarese and is available at: *Mom! Where's my car?* (website: http://momwheresmycar.com/pages/garage-goals). © Photograph: Lauren Savarese. Reproduced with permission.

Purvis, 1985). Funded by philanthropic organizations and frequently administered by women of wealth, historians have not only described the extent to which these programs 'represented an imposition of an idealized middle-class femininity' (Heggie, 2011: 275; see also Attar, 1990; Purvis, 1985) upon working-class women, but also the ways that

participants in the programs sometimes used them to increase their social maneuverability and status as well as to tacitly redefine the gendered power of the household (Bourke, 1994). Written into the logic of ordering and display – public and private/domestic alike – is a history of difference-making and distinction as well as power and desire – the display is an ordering not just of objects but of the world, and a demonstration of mastery over this world.

To be sure, domestic spaces and modern museums alike continue to reflect and promote these logics of order, collection and display. Interestingly, over the past 10 years or so, museum displays of personal collections and carefully arranged domestic items – as well as photographic renditions of these items – have themselves had their moment in the world of fine art: the personal collection has become a part of the museum collection. There was Song Dong's *Waste Not*, to be sure, but there was also, as another example, London-born collage and mixed media artist Simon Evans' 2008 piece entitled *Everything I Have* (2008, see Figure 2). In this piece, the depicted collection's parameters include every object – from clothing to canned food – that the artist owned at the time.Even more recently, Portland area photographer Jim Golden has created a series of hyper-aestheticized and visually stunning photographs of large collections, the themes of which include scissors (Figure 3) and locks of all different makes and sizes, barrettes (Figure 4), and furniture (Figure 5).

For POs, the logic (and aesthetic appeal) of the well-ordered display exists as a kind of 'common sense' knowledge about how things should be grouped, spaced, and separated from one another. They feel this ordering to be natural, obvious and right; they talk about having a 'sense' or an 'eye' for the work, and they describe the deep satisfaction they feel when they assist their clients in putting their material possessions into order. As curators of sorts, they entrain their clients toward this very same aesthetic sensibility. Their job, then, is not simply to sort and arrange objects, but to instill in their clients a 'feel' for order and to teach them how to derive joy and satisfaction from curatorial practices. The act of instilling this embodied sense of rightness in keeping house, it seems to me, is itself a form of *domestication* – it is a socializing process that, if successful, places neophytes within a dominant social order.

Attentiveness and attachment: How to handle things

Items in a collection, says Ellen, 'are not sitting in the bottom of a 30-foot heap.' A hoarder, Ellen continued, will say things like 'I have a collection of tea cups, they're in this room someplace.' But how can you tell me it's a collection when they're not honored, they're not displayed, they're not looked after? You don't even know if they're still intact 'cause they might be broken!' Similarly, in a *Real Simple Online* article from a few years ago entitled, 'Are You a Collector or a Packrat?', we are told that collectors handle their things differently than 'packrats':

> Being a collector means that you respect the items you are collecting. Tossing an object haphazardly … where it … can't be accessed by anyone other than the truly daring, and having no regard for its maintenance or upkeep is not respecting a collection. Stuffing objects into a cardboard box at the bottom of your closet or into an attic is also not respecting or protecting a collection. (Doland, 2011)

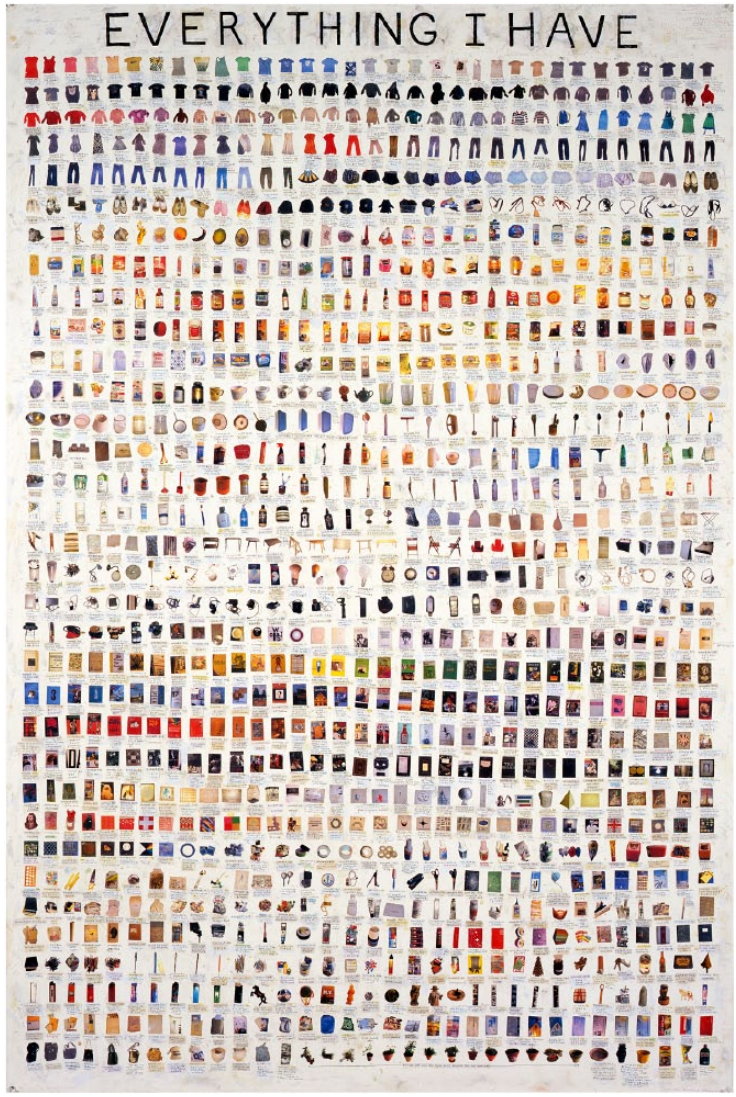

Figure 2. Simon Evans, *Everything I Have* (2008). Pen, paper, scotch tape, correction fluid and ink jet prints of personal inventory. © Simon Evans. Reproduced courtesy of James Cohan, New York.

Collectors, it is said, engage in a continual practice of care and cultivation, maintenance and upkeep; the proper handling and attending of objects is described as being tantamount to 'honoring' and 'respecting' those things. For this to happen, owners must carefully manage and negotiate both distance and attachment. Collectors temper their

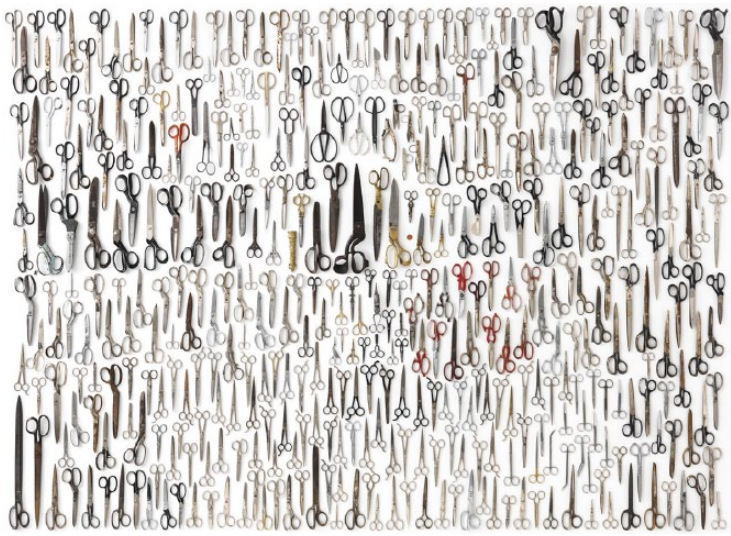

Figure 3. Collections Series – Scissors. © Jim Golden. Reproduced with permission.

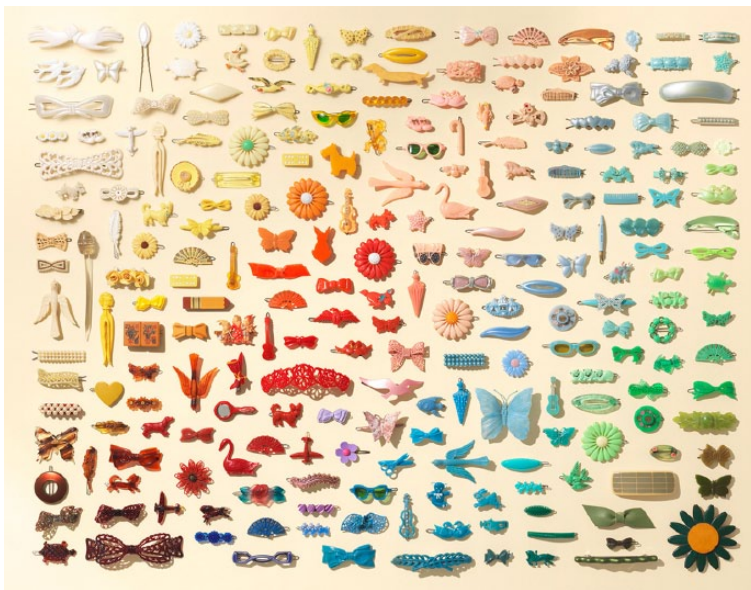

Figure 4. Collections Series – Barrettes. © Jim Golden. Reproduced with permission.

passions; they maintain a cool distance from their possessions and resist succumbing to the sentimentality that would threaten their sense of control over their collections. Above

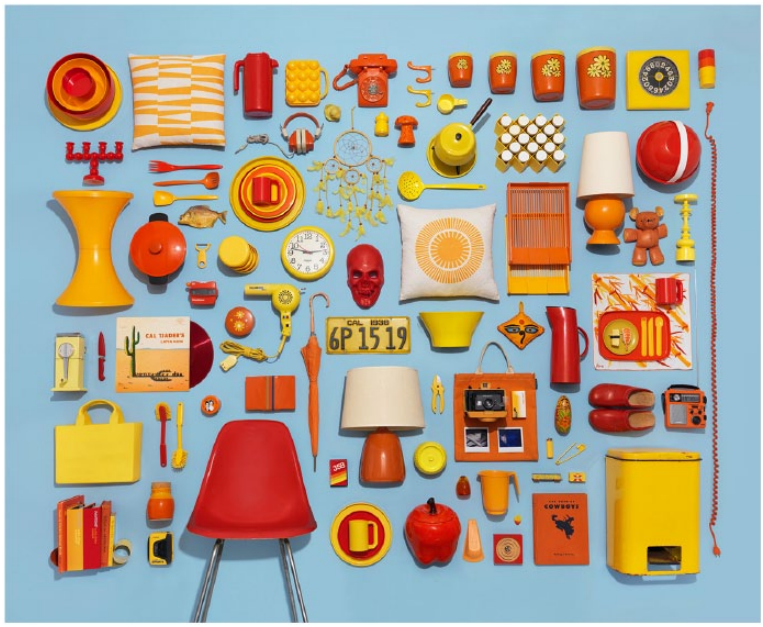

Figure 5. Collections Series – Furniture. © Jim Golden. Reproduced with permission.

all, POs say, collectors do not identify with or become one (or become 'other') with their things. In contrast, hoarders are described as not exerting the same kind of control or imposing the same kind of order over their stuff; they are depicted as being overpowered by the things they have amassed. The closeness they demonstrate toward their belongings seems inappropriate to the outside observer – too emotional, too absorbed, too blurred with the people themselves. From a non-hoarder's perspective, hoarders appear to care too much and not enough, all at once; they form strong attachments to their things and have difficulty letting go.

If such discourses about hoarding underscore tactility, closeness, and the collapsing of subject and object, contemporary representations of collecting disavow the tactile in celebration of the visual presentation of display, described above, and the management of distance between subject and object. Indeed, the most prized collectors' items are often those which have never been removed from their original packaging. As I have discussed elsewhere (Kilroy-Marac, 2016), some techniques that POs use with their clients actually attempt to transition them from a tactile mode to a visual mode of being with things. This helps their clients loosen their attachments to their possessions, thereby putting them at a 'proper' distance.

Walter Benjamin (1968[1961]: 60) saw the collector as embodying a 'dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order'. To him, the collector was engaged in a heartfelt struggle against dispersion and chaos and 'the world [was] present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects' (1999[1983]: 207). In the hands of the collector, Benjamin

insisted, commodities in their broken-down form and, after Adorno, 'hollowed out' of their use value might be contemplated and apprehended, and might also take on new meanings; things may be 'freed from the drudgery of being useful' (p. 9). We may ask if the nature of collecting – and the collector, as described by Benjamin – has changed since the 19th century, a period in which Benjamin had already remarked that 'the number of "hollowed-out" things increased at a rate and on a scale that was previously unknown' (p. 466). The collector Benjamin described was a liminal character that moved 'between the worlds of money and magic' (p. xii). Like the *flâneur* and the gambler, the collector was interesting to Benjamin because he (I say 'he' because the gendered assumptions surrounding each of these figures suggests that they were almost certainly imagined to be men) emerged within and yet maintained a unique perspective and position vis-à-vis the defining themes of the day: high capitalism, modernity, mass production, and technical progress. The figure of the modern collector, it seems, though still strongly gendered, no longer holds the same kind of liminal position. Like Benjamin's collectors, they are described in popular media reports, self-help books and blogs, and home and lifestyle magazines as being passionate about their collection; they are said to ponder their collections and become intimate with the qualities and distinctions of each item. But these sources also describe – and indeed instruct – readers that true collectors keep a keen eye upon and work to enhance the market value of their items. Modern-day collections and their objects, it seems, have been returned to 'the drudgery of being useful', if only as investments.

Along these lines, contemporary sources describe a specific attitude and affective disposition that collectors should exhibit toward their collections when other people are around lest they be confused with or taken for a 'packrat' or a hoarder. 'There is a level of pride, goodwill, and sport surrounding the collection', reads the same *Real Simple* article quoted above. 'Collectors are eager to talk about their items, show them to others, discuss trades and sales with other collectors, and may even brag a little if the mood strikes. People aren't embarrassed and don't feel shame about their collections' (Doland, 2011). While the hoarder may tend toward absorption and self-isolation, Nordsletten and Mataix-Cols (2012: 172) explain that 'most collectors appear highly social' in the sharing of their collections, often involving themselves in 'social clubs, online forums, and formal organizations dedicated to promoting collector interactions'. Collecting is here depicted as a sport and a social venture, as well as an investment of time and energy that, if tended properly, can bring the collector both honor and monetary gain – the modern collector's mode of handling things is thought to *increase* their market value, while the hoarder's mode is imagined to do just the opposite. Modern collectors are surely passionate about their collections, but they also keep a cool distance and stay vigilant about not letting their attentiveness slip into absorption. This privileging of attentiveness over absorption was at the very heart of what Benjamin himself noted to be the changing structure of experience wrought by modernity (see, for example, Benjamin, 1968[1961]).

Conclusion

The past 20 years have seen the rapid rise of single-use, disposable consumable items and the wide availability of cheap durable goods ('it used to be that you would have one

dining room table that would last you your whole life', Corine noted, 'now, there is Ikea'). The very same years have also witnessed the emergence of ethical consumerism, consumption-critical lifestyle movements, and a thriving clutter management industry, not to mention the birth of hoarding as a veritable mental illness, public health crisis, and media spectacle. As more people have access to more material goods, it is no longer just the fact of possessing things that stands as a matter distinction. In fact, having too much – especially without demonstrating the kinds of care and attentiveness to curatorial practice that I described above – may bestow upon a person a much more dubious status, even a psychiatric diagnosis. Popular and psychiatric imaginings of the differences between 'pathological' hoarding and 'normative' collecting articulate a complex set of rules, not just about how much stuff we should have (or about the proper, healthy, or moral limits of accumulation), but about how our possessions should be ordered, arranged, and organized. They also reveal a certain anxiety about how we, as late capitalist subjects, should behave towards our world of material things at this particular historical moment, and the extent to which our own status – as healthy, moral, and socially respectable individuals – may be closely tied to these practices. To make a mess or a hoard into a collection, as artist Song Dong and his mother did for the internationally acclaimed exhibit *Waste Not* and as POs like Gail and Fran do on a daily basis, is to engage in practices of active curation that seek to transform the value of contents and arrangers alike.

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Notes

1. This research began as an investigation into the emergence of Hoarding Disorder over the past 15 years. While fundamentally concerned with the question of why, at this specific historical moment, such intense scrutiny was being given to popular and psychiatric designations of normative vs pathological ways of being with things, the project quickly evolved into a broader exploration of how people relate to, talk about, and manage their material worlds and the material worlds of others (Kilroy-Marac, 2016).
2. The Toronto Hoarding Coalition (THC) was a working group created in 2011, in the wake of a much publicized hoarding-related fire that took place in a community housing high-rise in downtown Toronto. The central mission of the coalition was to bring social service providers and city agencies together to discuss local hoarding cases, best service practices, and to provide a clearinghouse for information on hoarding-related issues. The group, which

met quarterly, included social workers, therapists, city public health workers, first responders, community housing officials, legal service providers, eldercare/child protective services workers, animal protection workers, law enforcement officials, and cleaning specialists. In 2014, a Steering Committee was formed from within the THC that established the Toronto Hoarding Support Services Network (THSSN), a service that actually coordinates hoarding-related supports and for clients in need. As a participant observer and member of the THC and the Steering Committee, I attended meetings, workshops, and hoarding-related conferences put on by the THC and its affiliates.

3. Professional Home Organizers were recruited through local POC (Professional Organizers of Canada) chapters in southern Ontario, and through direct solicitations of local POs via their public websites. Several POs, having got wind of my research from their colleagues, actually contacted me to be part of the study. Initial interviews with POs took place between October 2014 and April 2015, with three follow-up interviews taking place in May and June 2015. Interviews took place in POs' homes or offices, or at local coffee shops or restaurants. Two interviews took place over the phone, and one took place via Skype. Interviews were semi-structured in nature, and typically lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours. I have published an article elsewhere (Kilroy-Marac, 2016) in which I describe the range of POs' professional training and accreditation procedures, give a brief history of the profession, and examine the techniques used by POs as they help their clients declutter their homes.

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Author biography

Katie Kilroy-Marac's research considers the social history of psychiatric thought, the evolution and naturalization of psychiatric categories, and the spaces in which local understandings of illness and suffering come into contact with (Western) psychiatric models. She is currently putting the finishing touches to her book manuscript entitled *An Impossible Inheritance: Postcolonial Psychiatry and the Work of Memory in a West African Clinic*, which is based on fieldwork conducted at the Fann Psychiatric Clinic in Dakar, Senegal. Her current ethnographic research examines the emergence of hoarding as a mental disorder, public health hazard, and media spectacle in North America. Of late, she has also become especially interested in how people attempt to craft ethical lives through consumption and its regulation.